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ABSTRACT

In response to requests by two communities in Nunavik (northern Quebec), an Inuit teachers' training program has been offered since 1985 to community school personnel by the Universite du Quebec en Abitibi-Temiscamingue. The language used by the students, teachers (or teachers-to-be), and professional resources in the program is Inuktitut. The development of professional knowledge and know-how in education comes up against the conceptual limits of the language. Therefore, as part of the training, a language-building process has developed throughout the years. The working approach is collaborative. Inuit teachers and pedagogical counselors know their first language and their culture. The university professors have expertise in curriculum development and academic discourse. Each group has its own cultural identity, so to ensure the harmonious development of the project, the principles of equal status and interdependence of the partners have been adopted in an interactive, intercultural process. The process must integrate the native Inuit way of transmitting knowledge and literacy on one part, and the analytical cognitive model of the mainstream culture on the other part. The use of Native first language can not be limited to the oral medium. The development of writing presupposes that agreements on a common alphabet and on writing conventions are made, yet Native languages have multiple dialects and a lack of official and legitimate structures to solve such questions. (TD)

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The Problematic of the Practice of Teachers' Training in Inuit Communities within a Perspective of Knowledge Construction in Collaboration

Gisèle Maheux and Diane Simard

Paper presented at the Fourth International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS)

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ICASS IV

Session : Teaching of Aboriginal Languages

The Problematic of the Practice of Teachers' Training in Inuit Communities Within a Perspective of Knowledge Construction in Collaboration

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Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue

As requested by two communities of the Nunavik, an inuit teachers' training program has been offered since 1985 to community school personnel by UQAT. This training carried out in partnership, aims at the development of knowledge and know-how relevant to the finality wished for in school education. The later consists of, on the one hand, the acquisition of the necessary tools to live in society and of, on the other hand, the development of knowledge allowing for insertion into community living and involving also the strengthening of cultural identity. The working approach is, in essence, collaborative and the language used for learning purposes, by the students, teachers or teachers-to-be and professional resources, is the inuktitut. The development of professional knowledge and know-how in education comes up against the conceptual limits of the language. Therefore, as a part of the training, a language building process has necessary developed throughout the years. The support given to the processes of interpretation, appropriation and expression of knowledge in inuktitut remains the path to privilege. It comes into being in three projects: the training activities, the curriculum development and the production of a lexical. Our objective is to present succinctly our approach in the context of these activities and to gather critical comments of remarks.

IV ième Congrès ICASS

Session : L'enseignement des langues autochtones

La problématique de la pratique de la formation des enseignant-e-s des communautés inuit dans une perspective de construction des savoirs en collaboration

Gisèle Maheux et Diane Simard
Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue

À la demande de deux communautés du Nunavik, un programme de formation des enseignant-e-s inuit est offert depuis 1985 aux écoles de ces communautés, par l'UQAT. Cette formation effectuée en partenariat, vise le développement de savoirs et savoir faire pertinents à la finalité souhaitée de l'éducation scolaire. Celle-ci consiste d'une part, en l'acquisition d'outils nécessaires à la vie en société, et d'autre part au développement de savoirs permettant l'insertion à la vie de la communauté et impliquant également le renforcement de l'identité culturelle. L'approche de travail est de type collaborative et l'inuktitut est la langue d'apprentissage des étudiant-e-s, présentement ou éventuellement enseignant-e-s ou autres ressources professionnelles. Le développement de savoirs et savoir faire professionnels en éducation se heurte aux limites de la langue au plan conceptuel. Dans le cadre de cette formation, un processus de construction de la langue s'est nécessairement développé au fil des années. Le support des démarches d'interprétation, d'appropriation et d'expression des savoirs en inuktitut constitue la piste d'action privilégiée. Il s'actualise dans trois chantiers : les activités de formation, le développement du curriculum et la constitution d'un lexique. Cette présentation vise à faire état, de façon sommaire, de notre approche dans le contexte de ces activités et de recueillir des commentaires critiques.

Introduction

For more then thirty years, the Inuit resources of the school in Nunavik have been involved in teachers' training. During the seventies, having been hired to teach in Inuktitut, at first without legal qualifications, these resources in education got involved in a process of training and of curriculum development. By so doing, they have introduced in school, elements of their social and cultural milieu, a fundamental step after a period of assimilation. They have also reinforced the Inuktitut as an object and a medium of teaching. From this time on, their involvement has contributed to reduce the gap between the school institution and the community.

The education finality has then become common to both Inuit and University resources : the socialisation of the youth from the Inuit communities and the strengthening of cultural identity in the context of the socioeconomic life of the 21st century. Progress has been realized since the introduction of schooling in the Inuit communities of Nunavik in the fifties. However, the integration of the school into the community remains a sociocultural change and a real challenge The actual high school diplomation rate[1] indicates that there is still a lot of work to do. We assume that first language teaching and learning is an important element at stake in the youth education progress and success. In this way the University supports the process of first language development undertaken by the Inuit resources in education from Puvirnituq and Ivujivik. This process that we call "language building" is part of a larger process of professional knowledge construction in formal education. Our conviction is that, developing the competence of the Inuit resources to teach Inuktitut in school, namely by the support of knowledge construction in Inuktitut, is a way to contribute to the education progress of the Inuit youth.

In this presentation we will make a brief description of the general context of the teachers' training project followed by a description of the language building process in three working areas : teachers' training activities, curriculum development activities and Inuktitut lexical in education. Then, we will present the working approach and bring up some difficulties and limits we encounter in the work of support in these various activities. Finally we will propose a few solutions for this problematic.

The Teachers' Training Project General Context

In the last two decades, the increasing political power and the process of gaining more autonomy in economical, cultural and educational matters have given the Inuit of Nunavik the possibility to develop their own policies and projects. It is within this context that in 1984, the School Committees of Ivujivik and Puvirnituq (IPUIT) took the necessary steps to initiate a cooperation project of educational services development with l'Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT). The components of this cooperation project are : the teachers' and other educational resources' training, as well as the development of the school curriculum and of the school project which would harmoniously unfold in its sociocommunal context. The University accepted the communities' request on the basis of its research and intervention expertise in education in isolated and sparsely populated areas. Representatives from both community schools and from UQAT then formed a co-management committee in order to address the training, development and action-research activities in partnership. This working group became thereon a privileged tool to monitor all the activities accomplished. The project working approach is one of collaboration between a university and two schools of Inuit communities. [2]

Language maintenance and development are important components of the partnership project. The central axis of these processes is the teachers' training program developed in 1984 and still in operation. Since the beginning of this project, a language building process has developed and evolved among the Inuit students and school resources involved.

The 'Working Areas' of the Language Building Process

In the following part we will present the three "working areas" of the language building process: the teachers training, the curriculum development, and the Inuktitut lexical in education activities, followed by the presentation of the working approach favored by the two groups of partners.

The Teachers Training Activities

The teachers' training activities are the central axis of the language building process. Two courses on psycho- and sociolinguistics bring the students to reflect on language. One specific course on the didactics of mother tongue contributes to improve the awareness of the language situation in order to develop students' competence to teach Inuktitut. An objective of the course being the understanding and the appropriation of the Inuktitut language learning content developed and its integration into practice. The students' training process within these three courses and within other courses of the program includes therefore the interpretation, the appropriation and the expression of knowledge processes in Inuktitut. The role of the University resources is to facilitate and to support the best they can, this professional knowledge construction in mother tongue. For instance, in a course on pedagogical evaluation where the students have to understand the concept of "measurement", for the appropriation of this concept, the Inuit resources conducting the course will refer to the Inuktitut word that has been used to translate this concept a few years before in the same course or in an other course of the program. Then, she or the whole group of students realizes that this term is inadequate since it reflects a partial and an outdated comprehension of the concept, comprehension that has evolved in time through training. Adjustment or development of a new word is then needed. The fact that words to express such abstract formal education concepts have to be constructed in Inuktitut compels University resources to bring up relevant references to answer this need. The resolution of this problem of lack of Inuktitut words favors a process of professional knowledge construction.

The Curriculum Development Activities

The curriculum development is a process realized by working groups composed of teachers and pedagogical counsellors administrators and school students in order to identify the teaching content of Inuktitut, from kindergarten to grade three and also to develop in Inuktitut, teaching and learning material in mathematics.

The development of the Inutkitut language teaching program was a need expressed by the Inuit leaders of the school. A decision was taken to proceed with the identification of this content

following the above mentioned courses in 1991-1992; namely, the course on the didactics of mother tongue.

At the time, the situation was the following : Inuktitut language was taught according to what each Inuit teacher knew and believed concerning what content was supposed to be taught to children. Neither the group of teachers, nor the persons in charge of school knew if the students went through an evolutive learning process, year after year, in a given subject. But every one knew that Inuktitut was taught. The teachers had the will to do the best they can. To improve their practice, they referred to Elders since they considered them to be more knowledgeable in the mother tongue and it is still the case.

For this project, the working group involves two types of actors : 1) Inuit teachers and pedagogical counsellors and 2) University professors. Teachers and pedagogical counsellors know their first and main language as well as their culture. The University professors have the expertise in curriculum development content and also in the didactics of a mother tongue. A university professor who has studied Inuktitut language through its research work and who is fluent in this language, has brought his contribution, as a specialist, in this particular project.

The curriculum development work has evolved as follows : The first step was to agree on a framework that would allow the mapping of the real teaching content as well as to identify what should be learned by the children in oral and in written language.

The second step was the analysis of the elements mapped in order to complete the whole content of the program for grade 1 to grade 3 pupils. For the analysis, the actual structure of the language program (in Quebec) was used. The analysis allowed the missing content to appear as well as the repetitions in the teaching content, and its evolution from one year to the following. At this step, an effort was made to express the content of Inuktitut language in a learning perspective : the content was formulated in terms of learning. For example, in speaking : to use proper words.

The third step corresponded to the pursuit of the analysis of the content, using a theoretical framework on first language teaching and learning within a communication perspective. This tool has been examined and studied by the group of student-teachers, within the already mentioned

training course. This process has deepened the understanding and has facilitated the appropriation of the new Inuktitut language learning content. Some new concepts were translated in Inuktitut. This step included a period of going back and forth from the theoretical tool to the observation of the practice. This process brought a certain refinement of the product and stretch out the existing teaching and learning content.

All along the process, the Inuit resources of the working group as well as the teachers of the school met, exchanged on the subject and put all the information together. The individual process was the following : some of the teachers have written the Inuktitut teaching content they use to teach their pupils. The production of the working group has been a document containing what is taught in Inuktitut from grade 1 to grade 3 pupils.

The Inuktitut Lexical in Education

The Inuktitut lexical in education is a process realized by the student teachers in large or small group in order to develop the adequate vocabulary in education; this process has evolved towards working groups : one related to pedagogical, didactical and educationnal contents and the other related to mathematics.

Since the beginning of teachers' training, the Inuit resources along with the students of the courses have developed words in Inuktitut to name the new concepts learned within the training process. These concepts are related to formal education. For instance, the resources had to develop the adequate vocabulary to express the concepts of "learning", "teaching", "objective", "planning", "evaluation" and various mathematical concepts, etc. A work of understanding through reflection and discussion, integration and contextualization has taken place all along the process. With the progression in the training process, the integration of knowledge and the understanding of these concepts, the Inuktitut specialized vocabulary has also evolved and extended. Through the time, in order to translate the concepts with more precision, these words and their definitions gathered along the years needed to be revised regularly : some words had to be adjusted and others replaced. In order to avoid repetition and a long process of reflection and translation in large group which is time consuming, and to be more systematic, two working groups have been put up. One group is composed of three Inuit pedagogical counsellors, two

from Puvirnituq and one from Ivujivik; the group support is done by a university resource in education. We are involved with this particular group which is working on the pedagogical, didactical and educational contents. Its activities have been in operation for more or less one year.

The other working group is composed of few Inuit professional resources (3 or 4), 2 young Inuit students from Puvirnituq, and a language specialist. The group support is done by a university resource which is also a Mathematics teacher in the community school.

The Working Approach Principles of the Partnership Project

A working approach which, as part of the action, integrates an intercultural context necessarily implies a dialogue between the partners coming from the different cultures involved, as well as a true respectful attitude.

In this project, two groups of partners interacts, on one side there are the Inuit school resources being students themselves : teachers, pedagogical counsellors and administrators from the involved communities; on the other side, the University resources namely professors/researchers. The first group brings notably their knowledge of experience which integrates individual and collective culture characteristics ; the second group acts as intermediary of scientific knowledge which integrates universal culture characteristics. In this sense, the University resources select the relevant theoretical material. Therefore we acknowledge, a priori, that each group of individuals, students and professors involved in this program has its own cultural identity. The recognition of each groups' cultural identity and knowledge is necessary to the harmonious development of the individuals and of the project. To make allowances for the cultural identities of both groups of partners and to favor its expression at the theoretical and at the practical level, the back-and-forth movement between these two types of knowledge is necessary.

The Principles

In the interactive process of the project which will be described further in this presentation, some principles have been taken into account by both groups in their approach, namely, the equal status, the interdependence of the partners and the personal involvement and development of a change process.

The equal status. The University and the Inuit resources in contact consider that everybody is important. Everyone has an equal status without regard to the function he or she fulfills.

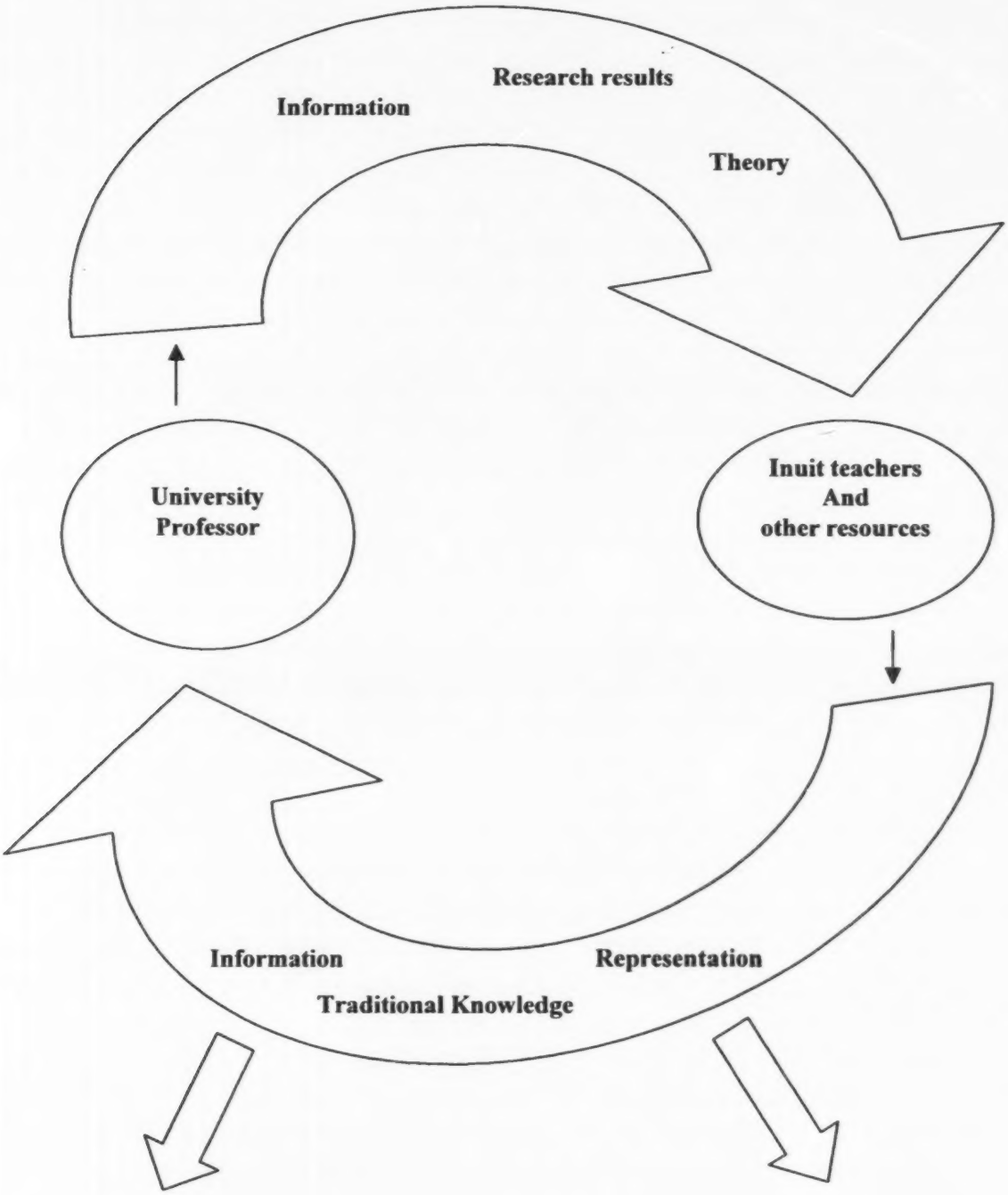
The interdependence. This element follows and complements the first one. Interdependence means that neither group can reach its goals or satisfy its needs without the assistance of the other.

The personal involvement and development of a change process. The work approach is based on human relations and is in fact an interaction laboratory where people learn and change through their experience and in interaction with others. In such "experience-based" learning situations, people must learn how to learn from their own specific experiences. Change is then self-directed. This interactive process allows the development of a change process within the person social environment as well.

The Work Interactive Process

The work interactive process qualifies the way this project is conducted in partnersip. The following figure presents and illustrates this process which may be called an intercultural process in the creation of a program.

WORK INTERACTIVE PROCESS



Creation of an Inuktitut language program

Development of educational practice

From a specific problem situation identified by one or the other partner, in the present case, building the Inuktitut language learning content (curriculum content), the University professors put on the table the information from research results and theory ; on the other side, Inuit teachers and other resources bring the relevant following information : knowledge whether from the traditional or actual life and its context, or knowledge drawn from their professional experience and their representation of the object on study. From this putting in common action and from the interaction of both partners knowledge and representations, emerge an innovative and genuine process and product: the creation of an Inuktitut language program. The development of the educational practice is also an output of what we may call an interactive intercultural process[4].

The work approach is innovative compared to what is seen in current practice. Usually, the curriculum definition is done centrally, a process from which the teachers are generally excluded or minimally involved, although evidence shows that the control of the students' learning situations resides mostly in the hands of those who are actually in the classroom.

In the process previously described, the two groups of actors shared the understanding of the program structure. That is why it is considered an interactive process that we may call intercultural in both the creation of a program as well as in the educational practice development. We will present next the limits and difficulties encountered in this process.

The limits and difficulties related to Inuktitut and to the work of support in the working areas

The Limits

The following limits apply to the projects above mentioned and are related to both the language and the university support. We observe that the analytical cartesian paradigm used in the training activities, in the curriculum development and in the Inuktitut lexical in education appears to create obstacles to the comprehension of concepts. Even though Inuit resources have participated actively in the construction process, a discomfort is perceived among them when using tools built from an analytical model. For instance, for older Inuit teachers, the Inuktitut program, namely the the Inuktitut curriculum framework, built from this type of model, is difficult to understand and

to integrate in their practice. Being from the generation where the oral language was predominant, we assume that they are reluctant to insert themselves into a process where the language is put into categories for teaching and learning purposes. Sociocommunal and cultural resistance as well as school language orientations are also elements to be also considered in this problematic. However for the younger student-teachers, who have gone through schooling for a longer period of time, the appropriation of the analytical model and of the tools constructed from it, comes more easily and naturally.

Open models which involve movements seems to fit better the knowledge conception and the intuitive cognitive strategy of Inuit.[5] Stairs refers to the concepts of "isumaqsayuq" and "ilisayuq" to identify the difference in what she calls the cognitive cultures.

> "*Isumaqsayuq* is the way of passing along knowledge through observation and imitation embedded in daily family and community activities, integration into the immediate shared social structure being the principal goal. The focus is on values and identity, developed through the learner's relationship to other persons and to the environment."[6]

"*Ilisayuq* is teaching which involves a high level of abstract verbal mediation in a setting removed from daily life, the skill base for a future specialized occupation being the principal goal." The author mentions that "[...] conventional formal schooling reflects many *ilisayuq* features..."[7]

The Inuktitut language itself is another important limit when the terms to translate abstract concepts in specialized fields as education are to be constructed.

Some Difficulties

Some difficulties can be identified as direct consequences of the development state of the Inuktitut language at an abstract level. In the teachers training activities, language tools in a

formal and public form are non-existent. Therefore they must be constructed along the training activities, for example: definitions of concepts, short texts, and figures in Inuktitut. Those tools are used for the interpretation and the appropriation of knowledge. The University resources support the process of language construction and, this way, increase their understanding of the learning context.

In the curriculum development, the main difficulty is the scarcity of human and material resources to work at this project. This situation brings out a lack of motivation to pursue the elaboration of the formal Inuktitut language curriculum. The questioning on the relevance of some of the educational materials developed constitutes another difficulty to overcome.

In the activities related to the Inuktitut lexical in education, as in the curriculum development process, finding a relevant productive working method which suits both partners, the Inuit and the University resources, constitutes the main difficulty encountered. The lack of human and material resources for language development, as well as of a legitimate and official structure to deal with Inuktitut language development questions in Nunavik, are other difficulties to overcome.

Considering the previous situation, the questions we may ask are the following: with respect to teachers training and Inuktitut lexical in education, is the process of language construction a limit or an addition in teachers training? At which conditions is it an addition for all people involved?

With respect to curriculum development, is the Inuktitut language curriculum, an intercultural content, which facilitates the teaching and the learning of the Inuit language and culture? What should be the school bilingual teaching and learning model that would fit the situation?

- **Conclusion**

The path of first language maintenance passes through " language birth " or revitalization[8]. The Inuktitut language building process described above is one step toward that direction. However, this process needs to be based on open models which integrate a way to assure the circulation between the native Inuit way of passing knowledge and literacy on one part, and the analytical cognitive model of the universal culture, on the other part.

Schooling in native mother tongue brings out an enormous challenge. The absence of conceptualization for native first language teaching and learning poses limits to didactical and pedagogical contents and to school professional competence development and, therefore, to language development.

Ten years ago, Lynn Drapeau summarized the challenge faced by native languages within the school context (in Québec).[9] She mentioned that the use of native first languages could not be limited to the oral medium. The development of writing supposes that agreements on a common alphabet and on writing conventions are made; readers and teaching methods have to be elaborated. The context of native languages is one of multiple dialects and one of absence of official and legitimate concertation structures to solve these questions.

As university resources involved in the development of education in Inuit communities for more then 15 years, we observe that this challenge still relevant and for a good part applicable to our working context in Nunavik.

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[1] After seven years of study, the diplomation rate (group of 1989-1996) is 23% compared to 73,25% in the whole province. Bergeron et Maheux, 1999.

[2] Maheux, G., Kenuayak, A. (1991). *A cooperative Project of Teachers Training Involving UQAT Human Resources and Ivujivik and Povungnituk School Leaders and Teachers*, Proceedings of the first Annual Conference of the Association of Circumpolar Universities, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, pp. 316-321

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[7] Ibid., p. 281

[8] Drapeau, Lynn (1993). *Language Birth : An Alternative to Language Death,* Proceedings of the XVth International National Congress of Linguistics, Québec, Université Laval, André Crochetière et al ed., PUL, 144.; Maurais, Jacques. (1992). *Les langues autochtones au* Québec, Les publications du Québec, 35 dossiers, CLF, 455 p.

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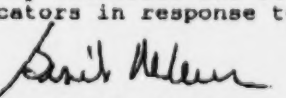
Signature:  Position: Professor

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